Rhetoric Society Quarterly
Vol. 46, No. 1, pp. 5–27

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Pragmatism and the Pursuit of Social Justice in India: Bhimrao Ambedkar and the Rhetoric of Religious Reorientation

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This essay engages the understudied Indian reformer, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956), in order to explicate pragmatism's influence in non-Western rhetorical situations. By charting the influence of John Dewey on Ambedkar as a student at Columbia University, this study explores Ambedkar's translation of pragmatism into an Indian context filled with religiously underwritten injustice. His form of pragmatist rhetoric focuses on conversion as a solution to the problems of untouchables in India, and represents a version of pragmatist rhetoric that is revolutionary in form and effect. Expanding our knowledge of how persuasion relates to religious conversion, I argue that Ambedkar constructs and employs a pragmatist rhetoric of reorientation. Honed by Ambedkar in the pluralistic context of India, this process is composed of three distinct steps: evaluation of existing religious commitments, renunciation of harmful worldviews, and conversion to beneficial alternative religious orientations.

Keywords: *Ambedkar*, *conversion*, *Dewey*, *Indian rhetoric*, *pragmatism*

> Man is not for religion, religion is for man. To become human, convert yourselves.
> —Bhimrao Ambedkar

> Religion is not like a house or cloak which can be changed at will.
> —Mohandas Gandhi

The great Indian statesman and reformer, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956), shocked his native land on October 14, 1956, when he stood in front of almost a half million lower-caste Indians and pronounced his conversion from Hinduism to Buddhism: "By discarding my ancient religion which stood for inequality and oppression today I am reborn" (Keer 500). He declared that his path was that of Buddhism and its moral message of equality for all. Both he and his audience knew that this moment delivered on a promise made in a speech at Yeola in October 1935 that even though he was born a Hindu, "I solemnly assure you

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ISSN 0277-3945 (print)/ISSN 1930-322X (online) © 2016 The Rhetoric Society of America
DOI: 10.1080/02773945.2015.1104717

that I will not die a Hindu" ("Unfortunately" 95). His conversion was followed by the mass conversion of hundreds of thousands of those assembled. His life as a newly minted Buddhist was not long, however, as Ambedkar passed away on December 6, 1956. Even on that sad occasion, over 100,000 lower-caste individuals followed Ambedkar's lead and converted to Buddhism (Jaffrelot 136). The publicity surrounding these events—his critique of Hinduism and the caste system, his conversion, and even his death—all form vital parts of his rhetorical struggle to lift up the "untouchables" or *dalits* of India. Much has been written on this fascinating movement for fundamental rights, but we have yet to examine what Ambedkar's example means for our understanding of persuasion and social change.

What adds to Ambedkar's mystique is that he stands between two worlds. Like his contemporary, Mohandas Gandhi, Ambedkar was trained in the West as an attorney. Unlike Gandhi, Ambedkar hailed from an "untouchable" caste, the Mahars. Against the social odds, Ambedkar received a decent primary education in India and took graduate training at Columbia University in America from 1913 to 1916. There he was exposed to a variety of prominent American academics in sociology, economics, and philosophy, including the pragmatist John Dewey. Dewey so influenced the young Ambedkar that Arun Mukherjee, in his study of Ambedkar's philosophical commitments, has cautioned those studying Ambedkar's thought not to read him "in isolation, without paying attention to his dialogue with Dewey" (368; also see Queen, "A Pedagogy"). Yet Ambedkar's focus and concerns were distinctively Indian. He wanted to reform the caste system that so crushed him and the untouchable classes. In a very important sense, Ambedkar's rhetorical activity in pursuing social justice in India can be seen as a melioriative appropriation of pragmatist concepts.

Ambedkar is also fascinating because he can be seen as a translator, though not of texts. He was engaged in *translating* in the sense analyzed by James Boyd White to capture the integrative, synthetic sense of language use in the border regions between cultures and different ways of communicating. Language use between different cultures exemplifies White's synthetic notion of performative utterance—communicators like Ambedkar have to pursue their own self-directed goals through language while navigating and integrating two distinct linguistic frames. This act of translating is not one-to-one, however. As White describes the act of translating across disparate language communities, "each element is transformed, as it becomes part of something else, an entity existing at a new level of complexity. At the same time we ourselves are transformed as well, both as makers of the new object in the world and as those who engage with it" (4). The act of translating produces a new object, and in doing so, synthetically contributes to a new self. What Ambedkar's example promises to add to this equation is twofold. First, he offers an example of the translation of pragmatist ideas and ideals for non-Western audiences. This will extend what we know of pragmatism's non-Western rhetorical influence beyond the work that has been done on Dewey as rhetor in China (e.g., Stroud, "Selling Democracy"), as well as the work analyzing the rhetorical activity of pragmatists in

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the West (e.g., Crick; Danisch; Stob, "Kenneth Burke"; "Lonely Courage"). Second, Ambedkar's emphasis on *conversion* in his translation of Dewey's pragmatist framework to the problems in India extends White's reading of translational activity. Instead of merely creating a new *text*, Ambedkar's appeals for religious conversion also promise to create a new *self* in the form of the audience member. This appeared to be Ambedkar's motive in speaking to various audiences around India: he was appropriating Dewey's thought to change the very important mental habits of those listening to him. He created new ways of talking through his pragmatism, as well as new selves in his audience members through conversion.

These features of Ambedkar as pragmatist rhetor translating between two conceptual schemes for a melioristic purpose can illuminate a potential sense of *rhetorical reorientation* resident in pragmatist theory. Many have found that Dewey's sense of pragmatism lacks any notion of revolution or immediate significant change; indeed, this criticism seems to undergird Dewey's critique of Marxist revolutionary means (e.g., Moreno and Frey) as well as accounts for his failure to gain long-term traction in a pre-Marxist China craving massive reform (Keenan; Wang). Ambedkar's appropriation reveals another path for revolutionary reform in the Deweyan mold. A revolution can entail a radical change in material conditions or in the orientation of subjects. Ambedkar's synthesis of Dewey's pragmatism is deeply persuasive in its nature—it attempts to change or convert the orientations of those listening. These orientations are wide-ranging mental habits that concern what is in the world, what is of value in the world, and how one is to act in the world (Stroud, "Pragmatism and Orientation"). Religious orientations are arguably among the widest conditioning factors to an individual's approach to the world, and this explains why Ambedkar's rhetoric of reorientation is ensconced in appeals to renounce or convert from a certain religious orientation.

In order to chart the complex translation of pragmatist schemas in Ambedkar's rhetoric of reorientation, this study will proceed in the following fashion. First, I will contextualize the battle over caste in which Ambedkar was locked, along with his formative encounter with Dewey's variety of pragmatism. Second, his important speeches, "The Annihilation of Caste" (1936) and "What Way Emancipation" (1936), will be analyzed as exemplars of Ambedkar's pragmatic rhetoric of reorientation. These texts will be read as instances of pragmatic rhetoric deployed in front of distinct audiences and guided by distinct persuasive goals. Finally, I will extrapolate from Ambedkar's rhetoric a general *rhetoric of reorientation* that can expand what we know of rhetorical means of conversion and religious change. This rhetoric will encompass both *reflection* on and *renunciation* of a given orientation, and *conversion* to another orientation. In Ambedkar's case, we see a unique use of orientational change to realize the goals of social change; in contrast to Marxist approaches of his time, Ambedkar focuses on the changes in habits that are vital to true liberation. The rhetorical practice of this south Asian pragmatist can add to the expanding circle of pragmatism's many inflections (e.g., Simonson), as well as to a general concept of the rhetoric of conversion.

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From Victim of Caste to Pragmatist Critic of Caste

To understand Ambedkar's translation of pragmatism into the Indian context, one must understand Ambedkar's history as the first untouchable leader of modern India. Ambedkar was the fourteenth child born to a humble Mahar family with a military lineage in 1891 in Mhow, Maharashtra. According to custom, Mahars were not the lowest class of untouchable, but their lot in life was still destined to be menial and hard. As Christophe Jaffrelot explains, they were obliged to render a variety of duties to the caste members of any given village, with some of these tasks being the very impure activities of removing dead cattle from village lands (21). Some outcaste groups, finding little other way to earn a living or sustenance, turned to the eating of carrion procured in their forced duties. This practice only further reinforced their impure status in the caste system of India, a system that dates back to Vedic times with the division between *brahmins* (priests), *kshatriyas* (warriors), *vaishyas* (merchants), and *shudras* (servants). Untouchables are those that fall outside of this division, and whose contact brings impurity upon those residing in the "touchable" castes. Caste concerns began to become important to young Ambedkar during his schooling in Dapoli. It was here that a caring but caste *brahmin* teacher, unable to touch the young student but concerned nonetheless about his status as an outcaste, decided to give him the surname "Ambedkar." Up to this point, his surname was "Sakpal," a term with clear outcaste baggage. Ambedkar began the English school at Satara, continued his early education in Bombay and finally graduated in 1907. In 1908, a provincial teacher from the area gave young Ambedkar a copy of his recent book, *Life of the Buddha* (Zelliot 67–68).

As Eleanor Zelliot describes, Ambedkar's education continued at the insistence of his father and with the help of royal patronage from the Gaikwad or ruling prince of Baroda (68–69). Ambedkar enrolled in Elphinstone College, eventually earning a degree in English and Persian. He was precluded from studying Sanskrit, the holy language of the Vedic and Hindu traditions, because of his caste affiliation. After this education, Ambedkar asked for and received an interesting offer—instead of repaying his educational debts through state service under the Maharaja in Baroda, he asked if the Gaikwad could support Ambedkar's wishes to study abroad, thereby postponing his service debt. The Gaikwad, whose son studied at Harvard, accepted the deal and granted the funds necessary for Ambedkar to study at Columbia University between 1913 and 1916. It was at Columbia that Ambedkar was introduced to an impressive slate of prominent American academics in a variety of fields, including philosophy, economics, and anthropology. As he later recollected, "The best friends I have had in my life were some of my classmates at Columbia and my great professors, John Dewey, James Shotwell, Edwin Seligman and James Harvey Robinson" (*Columbia Alumni News* 12).

Ambedkar's stay at Columbia was influential for at two reasons. First, he was exposed to the relatively free association of American life. Even with the serious racial and class-based oppressions evident in the America of the 1910s, Ambedkar

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found that, in New York at least, he was able to dine with whomever he wanted to, regardless of caste identities. He could also talk to a range of others without their worrying about the "polluting" nature of untouchables. This freedom even applied to his contact with intellectual figures—in the Indian context, talking or even being near untouchables held the risk of polluting another individual, so Ambedkar's intellectual contacts were adversely affected. In India, the young Ambedkar had to sit on a burlap mat that only he handled and could not get water from shared sources. Students disliked him using their blackboard since their possessions were nearby. These crippling caste restrictions did not exist for Ambedkar in America. Second, Ambedkar was heavily influenced by the thought of John Dewey. As K. N. Kadam recounts, "It is said that Dr. Ambedkar took down every word uttered by his great teacher [Dewey] in the course of his lectures; and it seems that Ambedkar used to tell his friends that, if unfortunately Dewey died of a sudden, 'I could reproduce every lecture verbatim'" (1). While Ambedkar kept in close contact with various acquaintances from Columbia, it is Zelliot's conclusion that "John Dewey seems to have had the greatest influence on Ambedkar" (69; also Queen, "A Pedagogy"). Dewey's philosophy, of course, holds a central focus on education and democracy, a fact cemented in Ambedkar's time with Dewey given the latter's 1916 publication of *Democracy and Education*.

It was in *Democracy and Education* that several distinctively Deweyan positions are enunciated in a sustained, integrated form. This book arose in a context of increasing tension due to economic and social matters brought on by an increasingly multi-ethnic society. Since this book appears to have greatly influenced Ambedkar, it will prove useful to highlight four important themes relevant to understanding the activities of Ambedkar the rhetor in his struggles for caste equality in India. First, it is in this work that we clearly see Dewey's continuation of the Jamesian notion of habit (of both body and mind), but coupled with education through the altering of habit-producing environments in formal education. We form habits in relation to some environment, and changes in that environment can consequently enable or encourage a reformation of habits in subjects. Second, we also see Dewey making it clear that a habit is not merely a thoughtless reflex but can also "mark off an intellectual disposition" that relates to a range of potential actions a subject may take (53). Habits can easily implicate ways of thinking through matters as much as they implicate embodied ways of reacting to external stimuli. Thus, it makes sense in Dewey's approach to education to speak of habits of inquiry or problem solving. Third, in *Democracy and Education* we witness the unique Deweyan marriage of political ideals (democracy) and formal education. Education is said to be politically important because it can instantiate and inculcate certain ways of associating with others; these ways of associating with others effectively point toward how we *communicate* or interact with others: "Society not only continues to exist *by* transmission, *by* communication, but it may fairly be said to exist *in* transmission, *in* communication" (7, emphasis in the original). We ought to pay attention to our communication practices—whether in formal educational settings or in society as

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a whole—since these practices greatly matter in what kinds of habits we instantiate now and in the future. As Dewey puts it, "Not only is social life identical with communication, but all communication (and hence all genuine social life) is educative. To be a recipient of a communication is to have an enlarged and changed experience" (8). The best sort of education instantiates the right sort of communication patterns *now* as preparation for the future.

Fourth, in this book Dewey gives some idea of what those sorts of patterns are—the democratic orientation toward interaction with others. Dewey points out that this is an *orientation* or mental habit that governs how we relate to others we are in social contact with; as Dewey states, "A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (93). This is a theme that was present in his writings from 1888, where he claims the priority of the social aspects of democracy over its political functions: "Democracy is a form of government only because it is a form of moral and spiritual association" ("The Ethics" 240). Democracy, according to Dewey, is primarily concerned with how individuals relate to each other. In practical terms, that implicates how they interact and talk with each other, and the assumed role they assign each other in the coordination of their actions. In an important passage in *Democracy and Education*, Dewey makes it clear what the "democratic ideal" is:

> The two elements in our criterion both point to democracy. The first signifies not only more numerous and more varied points of shared common interest, but greater reliance upon the recognition of mutual interests as a factor in social control. The second means not only freer interaction between social groups (once isolated so far as intention could keep up a separation) but change in social habit—its continuous readjustment through meeting the new situations produced by varied intercourse. And these two traits are precisely what characterize the democratically constituted society. (92)

Free and varied interaction between groups and individuals is vital for the Deweyan form of democracy. This does not simply take place in political decision making, but it also takes place in any society or group that offers some level of interaction among members. How do they treat each other? How do they value the other individuals? How flexible are these habits that govern and condition their social interactions with others? Dewey clearly prizes connections in his educational theory and argues that the "undesirable society, in other words, is one which internally and externally sets up barriers to free intercourse and communication of experience" (105). To achieve the ideal society, one must start inculcating the right sort of flexible and adaptive habits of associating with others wherever one can.

All of these themes seem to have influenced Ambedkar in his activities after returning from America. He concluded his education at Columbia in 1916, leaving with his M.A. but still needing to secure funds to publish his dissertation for the Ph.D. degree (ultimately awarded in 1927). After his studies at Columbia ended in

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1916, he went to London to study economics and begin his study in law. In the summer of 1917, he returned to Baroda to repay his debt to his royal benefactor. Here the crushing realities of his caste status weighed down on Ambedkar. Even with extensive training in law and at a variety of prestigious universities, he still found himself excluded from the simplest necessities of everyday life. Ambedkar—despite his post as Military Secretary to the Maharaja—was still treated with disdain by lower position state employees because of his Mahar caste affiliation (Keer). To avoid being polluted by the act of handing him work documents, staff members would throw these documents onto his desk from a distance. Ambedkar was not allowed to drink the water provided in the shared office, and floor mats were removed after he left an individual's office. The biggest blow came with his housing situation. No one wanted to house this highly trained untouchable, including his Hindu higher-caste friends (Keer 34–35). Even his attempt to stay in a Parsi-run inn under a falsely assumed Parsi name did not succeed; he was soon found out and driven out by Parsi men armed with sticks (Zelliot 71). Ambedkar had to leave Baroda and abandon his commitment to the state simply because his caste rendered him so tainted that his putatively normal interactions with others were feared.

This experience revealed to Ambedkar that caste must be addressed if one wanted the sort of integrated, flourishing democracy talked of by his teacher, Dewey. On January 27, 1919, Ambedkar seized his first chance to take part in the struggle against caste. It was then that he eloquently testified (in English) to the Southborough Committee, a group empowered by the British government to explore options for extending the franchise in India (Zelliot 112–13). This testimony is interesting because it reveals two things about young Ambedkar's commitments to reform. First, it highlights that at this early point he saw promise in political reforms as a way to help untouchables. Ambedkar asked the commission to reserve nine seats of the 100-person Bombay Legislative Council for separate elections by untouchable classes (115). This proposal differed from the policies of the Indian National Congress, which emphasized political reform as a way to eventually eradicate the causes of unequal representation, and moderate Hindu reformers, who wanted a minimal number of reserved seats for untouchables. Ambedkar wanted a more significant number of reserved seats for untouchables, but he also wanted an acknowledgement that something was deeply problematic within the Hindu social system. Ambedkar objected to positions implicating more moderate reforms in his testimony, arguing that they did not truly address the evil that was caste in India ("Evidence before" 263–64). According to Ambedkar, the Congress followed the line "that the social and the political are two different things having no bearing on each other." This leading party of Indian reform was "by design political Radicals and social Tories" (263). Ambedkar saw that they could not see the dependence of political reform on fundamental social problems such as caste. Hindu high-caste reformers, well-intentioned as they may have been, still made a fundamental mistake in that they depended on the vast majority of caste Hindu representatives to look out for the interests of the untouchable community. For Ambedkar,

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untouchables should be integrally involved in shaping their future. Reserved electoral seats were a prime way that he saw in 1919 to preserve the chance of such an outcome.

The second notable aspect to his testimony to the Southborough Committee concerns the reasons *why* he pushed so hard for guaranteed communal representation for untouchables. The reasoning behind this advocacy illustrates his debt to Dewey's pragmatist way of thinking about political and social reform. As Arun Mukherjee has documented, Ambedkar had a penchant for weaving Deweyan terminology and even Dewey's own way of putting things into his own rhetoric addressing the Indian context. Building on the work of James Boyd White, we can see that Ambedkar was appropriating Dewey's concepts and words in *translating* pragmatism into his own social projects. Appropriation is a complex topic, often merging the factual with the normative. It can often mean the *use*, unauthorized or authorized, of some technique, concept, string of words or ideas, or other materials from some originating person or group for some purpose. Appropriation can be general or specific in the content used, and can be attributed or nonattributed in terms of noting the source from which some material stems. The ethics of appropriation in intercultural settings is difficult; simple pronouncements concerning *all* cases of appropriation miss the nuance that it demands (Stroud, "Pragmatism and Comparative"; "Useful Irresponsibility?"; Ziff and Rao). One must be attuned to the various agents, intentions, and effects involved before a specific judgment is issued. In Ambedkar's case, appropriation is not simply a matter of one-to-one transmission of intellectual ideas. He is *using* or translating Western pragmatism in a novel way in his rhetorical activity to conceptualize and achieve distinctive ends in his Indian context.

We see two senses of translation *through* appropriation of pragmatist resources in Ambedkar's rhetoric: those that employ Dewey's exact words and those that utilize general concepts and themes from pragmatism. Depending on the instance, these are explicitly or only tacitly acknowledged by Ambedkar. As Mukherjee puts it, "So deeply embedded is Dewey's thought in Ambedkar's consciousness that quite often his words flow through Ambedkar's discourse without quotation marks . . . . Ambedkar not only borrowed concepts and ideas from Dewey, his methodological approach and ways of argumentation also show Dewey's influence" (347–48). The former type of translational activity occurs when Ambedkar speaks lines that are virtually identical to Dewey's text; such uttered but sometimes unattributed passages are almost exclusively culled from Dewey's *Democracy and Education*. In contexts of Western education and rhetorical performance, the unattributed uses come close to what one might call "plagiarism"—the unattributed use of the words of others as one's own. Ambedkar frequently cites Dewey, and at other places openly quotes him word-for-word. These moves constitute the latter sense of translation through appropriation. They would also seem to mitigate concerns that he sought to profit off of Dewey's hard work. The more charitable and sensitive explanation, especially given the propensity Indian speakers and traditions have of "echoing" or repeating past phrases and ideas, is that Ambedkar has *embodied* the Deweyan ethos—beyond

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specific words, he has begun to *think* and *argue* like Dewey would given those contexts. Keya Maitra's analysis implores us to see Ambedkar's pragmatism in words *and* in general spirit; this study, by detailing the ways that both types of appropriative activity occur in Ambedkar's rhetorical activity, extends such a multivariate approach into domains largely unstudied—how Ambedkar *argues* like a pragmatist in his Indian context to specific audiences.

Ambedkar's testimony illustrates his multilevel synthesis or translation of this Deweyan ethos into the critique of the caste system. Ambedkar clearly connects political reform to social causes, namely the division of society through the social institution of caste (numbering around 3,000 different castes in his time). Ambedkar echoes Dewey's exact words from *Democracy and Education* when he testifies that "Men live in a community by virtue of the things they have in common. What they must have in common in order to form a community are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge, a common understanding; or to use the language of the Sociologists, they must be like-minded" ("Evidence before" 248–49). This serves as an almost identical paraphrase of what Dewey claims in his 1916 *Democracy and Education* (7). At a more general level of synthesis through appropriation, Deweyan concepts are integrated into a novel critique of caste as an institution that affects Indian's mental habits or orientations toward each other, even those living in the same area. As Ambedkar puts it, "Persons do not become like-minded by merely living in physical proximity, any more than they cease to be like-minded by being distant from each other" (249). For both Dewey and Ambedkar, communication plays a role in the educative forming or reforming of like-minded orientations within groups. Ambedkar claims that "To cultivate an attitude similar to others or to be like-minded with others is to be in communication with them or to participate in their activity" (249). Interaction of a certain kind *is* an instantiation of a certain mental habit or orientation; such an instantiation, like any activity, builds the habitual structure for future instantiations. For Ambedkar, forming common and shared orientations that include all as equally valuable is the point of trying for democratic reforms—as he tells the committee, "Like-mindedness is essential for an harmonious life, social and political and, as has just been shown, it depends upon the extent of communication, participation or endosmosis" (249). Ambedkar would only get more novel, and more bold, with his specific and general appropriations of the pragmatist spirit in the coming years (Queen, "Ambedkar's Dhamma").

Ambedkar and the Push for Conversion

Ambedkar's fight against the injustices of caste continued to rely on rhetorical activity. He used newspapers and public conferences as major ways to reach the thousands of untouchables who are ordinarily left out of Indian political discussions. The masses of untouchables assembled for his conferences allowed for educative and inspiring political discourse; these gatherings served as perfect rhetorical means for a populace that was largely excluded from high quality education

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and literacy. As Zelliot points out, this method was effective: "it is clear that thousands of Untouchables saw and heard Ambedkar at perhaps a dozen large and many small conferences held in various areas of Maharashtra" (75). Ambedkar's rhetorical activity also extended to political negotiations in London and India with the likes of Mahatma Gandhi. The relationship between these two great figure of Indian politics soured in 1930 and 1931 in the context of the Round Table Conferences in London concerning the political franchise and fates of various segments of the Indian population. In the second conference and back in India, Gandhi objected to Ambedkar's demands concerning separate electorates for untouchable communities. Gandhi was against any separation of the untouchables from the main Hindu community, since he saw this as further weakening the Hindu stance in light of Muslim demands in an increasingly fractious India. Gandhi even engaged in a fast until death against a key concession Ambedkar had gained from the British for untouchable representation (Jaffrelot 65–66). Gandhi supported the untouchables, but he wanted such support to be firmly entrenched within the Hindu social system. He even went so far as to affirm the separations between castes as non-harmful: "Interdrinking, interdining, intermarrying, I hold, are not essential for the promotion of the spirit of democracy. I do not contemplate under a most democratic constitution a universality of manners and customs about eating, drinking and marrying. We shall ever have to seek unity in diversity" ("The Caste System" 83–85). Gandhi, like many high-caste Hindu reformers, was firmly committed to the basic idea of the castes in Vedic thought—that society was divinely and best organized when animated by a set number of hereditary castes.

Ambedkar's translation of Dewey—at both specific and more general levels—into the battle against caste changed its tenor by 1936. Resistance from Gandhi and other Hindu reformers made Ambedkar doubt the efficacy of political reforms to affect social systems, and he felt a renewed sense that it was social maladies that caused the most severe problems in the Indian context. After a series of civil and political battles, including a variety of protests for temple entry by the untouchable classes, Ambedkar's rhetoric began to change in the mid-1930s from one advocating political reforms to one focusing on the reconstruction of religious orientations in his audiences. Even though he continued to agitate for political reforms throughout his whole life, Ambedkar began deploying a pragmatist rhetoric that sought social change through religious reorientation. 1936 is an important year for two reasons. First, his rhetorical activity in 1936 comes shortly after his stated desire at the October 1935 Yeola conference not to remain a Hindu: an initiating call for his conversion, even though no target religion was indicated (nor would be chosen for 20 years). Second, Ambedkar created and publicized two contrasting texts that exemplify his rhetoric of reorientation and its appropriation of Deweyan democratic themes in 1936; these artifacts also display an instability in exactly which audience he thought most profitable to address. Around May 1936, Ambedkar released the print copy of a speech ("Annihilation of Caste") he was to present to a conference of high-caste Hindu reformers. Also in May 1936, Ambedkar delivered a speech

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entitled "What Way Emancipation?" to an audience of untouchables in Bombay. Both of these speeches serve as rhetorical attempts to push his program of democratic conversion to two distinct audiences—an audience of higher-caste reformers that could be persuaded to help lower-caste individuals, and another audience of untouchables that could be convinced to help themselves.

Orientational Reconstruction and High-Caste Reformers

Ambedkar must have been thrilled—but surprised—when he received the invitation to give the presidential lecture to the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal of Lahore. It would be his first time addressing an audience of higher-caste Hindu reformers, and it presented a unique situation in which to push his message of reforming the caste system. As Ambedkar admits, he understood the Mandal's purpose as a social reform group as singular—"to eradicate the Caste System from amongst the Hindus" ("Prologue to" 27). Yet the Mandal and Ambedkar wrestled back and forth about minor matters such as where his address would be printed, primarily because the Mandal harbored worries about the ultimate message of his address. One correspondent, Sant Ram, voiced the Mandal's worries when he wrote "I am now very anxious to read the exposition of your new formula—'It is not possible to break Caste without annihilating the religious notions on which it, the Caste system, is founded'" (27). The Mandal seemed concerned that Ambedkar's appeals to destroy caste might destroy too much; the threat of religious collateral damage seemed great. Ambedkar held his ground and refused to give the Mandal a detailed look at his speech prior to the increasingly delayed conference dates. As Dhananjay Keer notes, the Punjab press and the orthodox Hindu public severely criticized the Mandal for picking a speaker such as Ambedkar. Not helping things was the publicly known detail that in April 1936 as the conference was being delayed, Ambedkar was speaking to and meeting with the Sikh community at Amritsar to feel out possible paths for a mass untouchable conversion (Keer 267). The Mandal, caught between urges to reform the way lower-caste individuals are treated and a respect for the Hindu holy texts that so often are used to justify caste oppression, faced a difficult choice with this polarizing orator. The Mandal asked Ambedkar to remove all references to the Hindu *shastras* and holy texts; Ambedkar refused. The Mandal decided to postpone the conference indefinitely, and Ambedkar insisted he could not give the address in any case under such pressure and censorship.

Ambedkar already had 1500 printed copies of this English address, so he ended up selling these as a standalone work in 1936. It sold out within two months ("Prologue" 25). Two other editions of this address were printed, reaching a wider audience than originally planned. The second edition in 1937 also included Gandhi's reply to the original publication of "Annihilation," as well as Ambedkar's passionate rebuttal. The earlier edition was used in May 1936. Ambedkar could not attend an All-India Depressed Classes Conference in Lucknow because of illness. The printed "Annihilation" address was read instead, and elicited shouts of

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"Victory to Ambedkar" from a mixed audience comprising lower-caste individuals as well as representatives from other faiths hoping to gain the untouchables as converts (Zelliot 156–57). This speech was powerful due to its content, but it also owed its persuasive force to its language. As an English address, it represented lower-caste eloquence in the language of the colonial oppressors. As an untouchable, Ambedkar was forbidden to hear or speak Sanskrit, the millennia-old sacred language of Hindu philosophy. Mastery of English served as an empowering move for Ambedkar. It opened his eyes to the resources available in Dewey and other European thinkers to criticize the oppressive caste system and British rule, and immediately differentiated him from other Hindu reformers who, like Gandhi, extended the Sanskrit tradition of Hindu social thought. English was a source of empowerment and visibility—"had he not written in English, he would certainly not have become a pan-Indian figure" (Anand 2056).

As originally planned and formulated, Ambedkar's message in his "Annihilation" speech to the Mandal was aimed at Hindu higher-caste reformers. This public was interested in reforming the caste structure so as to remove the most egregious instances of oppression of untouchables, but it was also committed to a deep respect for the *Vedas* and the *shastras*. Ambedkar's "Annihilation" speech attempted to persuade these individuals—so committed to Hinduism as they are—that solving the issue of caste involved radical measures, not piecemeal change. Ambedkar knew this was a tall order given the rhetorical situation. His undelivered speech curiously anticipated the sort of attitude among these Mandal members that ultimately stymied this address's public acceptance. He begins his attempt to persuade the high-caste Hindu reformers by noting that their shared struggle is an unpopular one in India, resisted by political reformers who want to ignore the social and socialists who insist the problem is merely economic in nature ("Annihilation of" 38). To capture this sympathetic but still devotedly Hindu audience, Ambedkar puts the social in front of the political in the agenda of reform in India. He points out the discrimination fostered by caste, a point surely known by the higher-caste reformers he was to address with this speech. Starting with his stance that "political reform cannot with impunity take precedence over social reform in the sense of reconstruction of society," he takes direct aim at what he considers the surface matters of political reforms (42).

This was all well and good for a high-caste audience, had they heard this speech. The shocking part, at least for the higher-caste reformers of the Mandal, comes from Ambedkar's diagnosis of the cause of the problem. The revolution he wanted in society would not come from altering the statutes of a given municipality, or as the socialists claim, the economic classes in society. This was a deep-seated social problem that had its roots in a "mental attitude" or orientation of caste members toward other castes (46). Reorganize the material and economic matter of society, and the socialist will still face the mental attitude that is caste: "turn in any direction you like, caste is the monster that crosses your path. You cannot have political reform, you cannot have economic reform, unless you kill this monster" (47). This monster of caste is not physical; it is very similar to the mental habits and attitudes Dewey talks

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of in his work on ethics and education from the 1910s and 1920s. Ambedkar remarks that "in every Hindu the consciousness that exists is the consciousness of his caste" (50). Ambedkar is shifting the focus from a revolution against an overt political system to one of epochal reorientation within each member of society. To revolt against the monster of caste, then, is to address these mental habits that condition the consciousness of those who comprise various social groups in Indian society. What Ambedkar sought first was a mental revolution within Indians implicated in the caste system.

This diagnosis of caste as mindset or orientation is vital for Ambedkar's rhetoric of reorientation—it is what conversion will attack. His rhetorical practices make sense of this target in Deweyan terms. Ambedkar's appropriative use of the pragmatist ethos is so extensive that he employs Dewey's own phrasing—slightly altered at points—to make his case. External habits or common activities do not make a society in the rich sense, according to Ambedkar. Echoing Dewey's way of putting it in *Democracy and Education*, Ambedkar claims

> Things may be passed physically from one to another like bricks. In the same way habits and customs, beliefs and thoughts of one group may be taken over by another group and there may thus appear a similarity between the two . . . . But no one could say that because there was this similarity the primitive tribes constitute one society. This is because similarly [*sic*] in certain things is not enough to constitute a society. Men constitute a society because they have things which they possess in common. (51)

In appropriating Dewey's words from *Democracy and Education* (7), Ambedkar is translating the pragmatist concern with habits into the struggle against caste as divisive mental orientation. As he states in his speech, "Parallel activity, even if similar, is not sufficient to bind men into a society" (51). Like Dewey, Ambedkar is concerned with the orientations that enable individuals to share activities *and* interests, not simply to pursue similar activities out of harmful self-interest. In the case of India, he is claiming that "The Caste System prevents common activity and by preventing common activity it has prevented the Hindus from becoming a society with a unified life and a consciousness of its own being" (51). The "worst feature" of this caste system is not the physical divisions it mandates, but the "anti-social spirit" that undergirds it and ultimately causes and conditions all the physical manifestations of caste behavior. Ambedkar's Deweyan rhetoric highlights the problem of orientation or mental attitude here as primary. What he seeks is the "fellow-feeling" displayed by other groups in India (such as the Sikhs and Muslims), or the Deweyan like-mindedness he talked of in 1919. The orientation engendered by caste kills "public spirit," "public charity," and "public opinion" (56). What sort of reconstruction of orientation could address the attitudinal problems besetting the Indian context?

Ambedkar's rhetorical activity translates and employs specific Deweyan phrases as well as Dewey's general pragmatist focus on community into the new context of the anti-caste struggle. This translation was sensitive to his audiences. To his

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high-caste audience, he focused primarily on persuading them to examine and abandon key parts of their religious heritage. He states, "Religion compels the Hindus to treat isolation and segregation of caste as a virtue. Religion does not compel the Non-Hindu to take the same attitude toward caste. If Hindus wish to break caste, their religion will come in their way" (65). Combine this with his criticism of smaller moves that might be supported by the Mandal and one sees the inevitable conclusion. Inter-caste dinners are physical, outer activities that do not necessarily kill "the spirit of Caste and the consciousness of Caste"—they do not affect the *orientation* of those dining (67). Ambedkar agrees with the Mandal and states his support of inter-caste marriage, claiming that "The real remedy for breaking Caste is inter-marriage. Nothing else will serve as the solvent of Caste" (67). Yet this agreement is superficial, as Ambedkar's Deweyan ethos goes deeper than changing a few external activities. To implement inter-caste marriage, you must remove the orientational causes against its instantiation, and to do this you must address the root cause of these orientations—religion. Ambedkar uses shared spaces of agreement to incline his caste audience toward the more radical program represented by his rhetoric of religious reorientation. He and the Mandal agree on the putative solution, inter-marriage. But this solution is precluded by existing caste structures, and those structures are not physical but mental: "Caste is a notion, it is a state of mind. The destruction of Caste does not therefore mean the destruction of a physical barrier. It means a *notional* change" (68, emphasis in the original). Ambedkar's radical appeal now comes to fruition in the way he describes this cause in more detail: "it must be observed that the Hindus observe caste not because they are inhuman or wrong headed. They observe caste because they are deeply religious. People are not wrong in observing Caste. In my view, what is wrong is their religion, which has inculcated this notion of Caste" (68). This leads him to his conclusion, a shocking one to the high-caste Hindu audience—"If this is correct, then obviously the enemy, [that] you must grapple with, is not the people who observe Caste, but the *Shastras* which teach them this religion of Caste" (68). By taking aim at the *shastras*—a class of texts that explain and amplify the Vedic world view and enjoined human activity—Ambedkar is impugning the core of what it means to be a Hindu. His audience members are to reconstruct their religious orientation toward the central texts of their faith, and "deny their authority, as did Buddha and Nanak" (69). If asking individuals to "give up Caste is to ask them to go contrary to their fundamental religious notions," then Ambedkar's rhetorical appeals point to the conclusion that one should first give up those religious notions, then ask others to do the same (69).

Radical reconstruction of one's religious orientation is the implication of this address. For this audience of Hindu reformers of the caste system, Ambedkar ends by asking them to give up that which makes them a Hindu. Thus, the stage of reorientation pushed here is movement *away* from certain key tenets of Hindu thought. It may even be taken as a call to renounce one's Hindu orientation due to its harmful effects. He offers no other religious notions to hold dear; he vacillates between praising the models provided by the Buddhists and Sikhs that question the

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shastras. His bottom line is that the Hindu *shastras* need to be critiqued by reason and rejected as vital in shaping one's orientation toward society. Adopting the language of Dewey, Ambedkar appeals to the use of "reflective thought" in breaking out of our usual "habitual and unreflective" everyday patterns. Reflective thinking, a canonical term for Dewey, holds the same import for Ambedkar in his appeal to high-caste reformers: "Reflective thought, in the sense of active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form or knowledge in the lights of the grounds that support it and further conclusions to which it tends, is quite rare and arises only in a situation which presents a dilemma—a crisis" (73). This way of speaking represents Ambedkar's appropriation of Dewey's "problematic situation" in his rhetoric of religious reorientation. Ambedkar wants his audience to avoid an unreflective reliance on ancient religious habits of thought and action; without reflection, one overlooks the harm that these habits propagate among the untouchable classes. By extending the power of reason to discern the extent and functioning of this problem, why not submit other accepted and culpable parts of one's religious orientation to it?

Ambedkar claims that the "two most powerful weapons in the armoury of a reformer" are "reason and morality" (74). The latter seems to implicate his love for the moral ideals of democracy—equality, fraternity, and liberty. This is a deeper sense of morality than conceptualizing of it as a set of mere rules to follow. Reason seems to be our ability to form, apply, and reform *principles* that govern activity and thought. Ambedkar, borrowing a line from Dewey's portion of the 1908 *Ethics* (301), argues that: "Rules are practical; they are habitual ways of doing things according to prescription. But principles are intellectual; they are useful methods of judging things" (75). He then goes on to paraphrase Dewey's distinction between a rule and a principle—"Rules seek to tell an agent just what course of action to pursue. Principles do not prescribe a specific course of action" (75). Instead, they provide an "important consideration" that guides one in reflectively thinking through an action and its full meaning. Rule-following is portrayed as "mechanical," whereas principle-employing reflective thought leading to action is "conscious and responsible." We see the Deweyan vocabulary employed by Ambedkar to create something novel—a new critique that calls for one's held religious orientation to be renounced through one's personal reconstruction or conversion. What his Hindu audience must seek is a religion that is "a matter of principles only," preferably universal spiritual principles (75). The "finality and fixity" of a rule-based religion ought to be abandoned; employing the language of a pragmatist, Ambedkar points out that "Happiness notoriously varies with conditions and circumstances of a person, as well as with the conditions of different people and epochs. That being the case, how can humanity endure this code of eternal laws, without being cramped and without being crippled" (76)? Here we see Ambedkar deploying the reasonable-sounding vocabulary of an anti-foundationalist pragmatism to question the most foundational matter of his high-caste Hindu audience's lives—their religious orientation and its entailed rules of behavior and caste. Religious reorientation

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or reconstruction begins with his audience moving away *from* an orientation they have unreflectively held so dear.

Rhetorical Reorientation as Self-Emancipation for Untouchables

Ambedkar's pragmatist commitments force him to consider the sorts of habits his audience might have. For his untouchable audience, his goal was to effect rhetorically a reorientation toward self, other, and value in the world. Ambedkar's frustration came to a head in the 1930s since "For the past ten years Ambedkar had tried in vain to create an opening for his people into Hindu society. He had to fight to secure for his people the right of drinking water from public places, the liberty of wearing good dress and of using metal utensils, and the right of receiving education" (Keer 251). At Yeola in 1935, he declared his urge to leave the folds of Hinduism through conversion. After the debacle of his "Annihilation of Caste" address, he became more convinced that higher-caste reformers were not willing to make the ideological sacrifices needed to lift the untouchables out of their social predicament. Shortly after that address was supposed to occur, he convened a large conference of untouchables to address directly the issue of conversion. At the All-Bombay District Mahar Conference on May 30–31, 1936, Ambedkar delivered "What Way Emancipation?" to an exclusively Mahar audience of approximately 35,000 people. These audience members, like Ambedkar, had all personally experienced the oppression and harm that being labeled as a low-caste "Mahar" entailed. This personal connection to the rhetor and his topic most likely explains why this audience sat in rapt attention through all fifty pages of Ambedkar's Marathi-language oration (Keer 273).

In his appeal to this Mahar audience so supportive of his project, Ambedkar equated democracy with a mindset that prioritized the values of self and other. In his "Emancipation" address, he glosses this mindset as one concerned with sympathy, equality, and liberty. These are all "factors" that are "required for the uplift of an individual" (123). The individual is central to Ambedkar's pragmatist extolling of community, since classes and groups are collections of individuals. Hindu society, according to Ambedkar, is lacking in all three of these features. It is saturated with caste, a social structure that has real effects on the happiness and flourishing of individuals like those in Ambedkar's audience. Ambedkar need not describe the horrors of this caste system to an audience that is all too aware of them. Instead, he *redescribes* the problem of caste in a particularly Deweyan manner—he equates untouchability to slavery, but not one of mere physical control. It is a form of "mental slavery" that binds one through one's own complicity to a certain diminished social role (129). Indeed, "the Untouchables are in more need of social liberty than that which is guaranteed by law. So long as you do not achieve social liberty, whatever freedom is provided by law to you, is of no avail" (127). What is missing is "freedom of the mind," a condition that makes an ostensibly free individual really a "slave," "prisoner," or "dead" man (128). Real, meaningful, and lasting freedom

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must start with the possession of freeing mental habits. The caste system is a habitualized way of thinking of self and other that places one in a subservient position, even if laws are passed that guarantee a certain level of treatment. Ambedkar urges his untouchable audience to aspire to the level of being "a man who is his own master" or "a free man" (128). What is such a person? Ambedkar explains this as an *orientation* toward self, other, and the value of activity:

> I call him free, who with an awakened consciousness, realises his rights, responsibilities and duties, he who is not a slave of circumstances, and is always bent upon changing them in his favor. . . . One who is not a slave of usage, customs and traditions, or of teachings because they have come down from his ancestors, whose flame of reason is not extinguished, I call him a free man. (128)

The individual's mental attitude toward self and society is not the only aspect relevant to social melioration, but it is the vital element that conditions, enables, and transforms other factors. External, political, or material changes matter little if one's internal orientation stays the same.

Ambedkar's rhetoric of reorientation becomes prominent in this address when he foregrounds the sources of power available to his Mahar audience. Their power does not lie in numbers or "man-power," since there is the chance that other untouchable groups will not show solidarity with the Mahars. Ambedkar admits that untouchables in the Bombay Presidency are only one eighth of the population (119). Does their strength lie in money? The Mahars, like other untouchable groups, tended to lack financial success due to their systematic exclusion from the mainstream economy of India. Ambedkar postulates one final area that power can stem from in social matters: mental strength. He is initially pessimistic about this source of power, since "for centuries, you have not only served the higher caste but also tolerated their insults and tyranny without grudge and complaint, which has killed the sense to retort and revolt" (119). The untouchables have become habituated to being societal slaves. This is the orientational reality of the caste system as a form of mental slavery. Ambedkar's rhetoric of reorientation is promised as a way to remove the weakness entailed by this mental slavery. People have power over what they value, according to Ambedkar, and religion is simply a wide-ranging system of values that governs humans. For Ambedkar the pragmatist, "individual welfare and progress (individual development) should be the real aim of the religion" (122). Religion, looked at in a pragmatic sense, becomes a means that can help or harm human welfare and flourishing. This thought completes Ambedkar's oration—conversion is an answer to the question of "What should be done for the betterment of our life? How are we to carve the path for our future life" (116)? The reconstruction of religious orientations toward self, other, and activity serves as the vital means to better individual and group welfare.

According to Ambedkar's oration, untouchables cannot change Hinduism while remaining a habituated part of the caste system. Minor changes in outer activity cannot affect the desired change—as Ambedkar tells his audience, "Castes cannot be abolished by inter-caste dinners or stray instances of inter-caste marriage. The Caste

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is a state of mind. It is a disease of the mind. The teachings of the Hindu religion are the root cause of this disease" (130). What is his audience to do? The important step after sensing a problem is leaving one's current religion: "so long as we remain in the religion which teaches a man to treat [an]other man as filthy, the sense of discrimination on account of caste which is deeply rooted in our minds, cannot be abolished. For annihilating the castes and the Untouchability from among the Untouchables, change of religion is the only antidote" (131). What does changing your religion entail? As Ambedkar frames the matter in this oration, religious conversion should be thought of as having two aspects—"Social as well as Religious; Material as well as Spiritual" (117). Religious affiliation will mean certain social or material actions will be pursued, certain languages and rituals will be employed, and so forth. Beyond this, there will be a spiritual side to religion. This aspect is best conceptualized as the orientation or disposition inherent in being a member of *that* religion. One of the principle characteristics of the religions that Ambedkar discusses—Sikhism, Islam, and Christianity—is that they are effectively homogenous and without the graded inequality that structured the Hindu castes. Each person is valuable, and birth does not grade or rank the worth and respect that one is due. Conversion is the reflective reconstruction of these deep mental habits of how we engage and value the various parts of our social world.

Emphasizing the spiritual or orientational aspect to religious reconstruction clarifies one puzzling part of Ambedkar's address. If the problem caste presents is an exclusion from valuable sectors of Hindu society, how can religious conversion qua separation solve this already-existing alienation? Why would Hindus treat untouchables as equals simply if the latter leave the fold of Hinduism? As religious conversion embraces spiritual as well as material aspects, one can expect Ambedkar to answer this question on its own ground. He claims that untouchables are *already* separate, and that conversion will not increase this problem (131). It only risks working, he claims. Another line of defense against this charge can be identified, if we see Ambedkar's argument in light of the internal–external continuum that harmonizes with Dewey's *Democracy and Education*. Habits of thought structure our activity, but they are not separate from such manifest activity. Our actions and pursuits shape or strengthen these habits. Reorientation is a way to shock the existing sets of habits by thinking and acting in a radically changed manner. Our actions also include how we speak of self and how we communicate with others. Examining the implications of rhetorical reorientation, Ambedkar mentions that the labels or "names" we give ourselves or allow others to affix to us shape our destiny: "The names that depict your caste are considered so filthy that even their utterance is enough to create a vomiting sensation in the heart of Hindus" (132). The reorientation involved in conversion implicates our linguistic actions of labeling, along with their effects: "To call oneself a Muslim, a Christian, a Buddhist or a Sikh is not merely a change of religion but is also a change of name" (132). This change of name has consequences, as it is not as transparent as changing one's label from hated "outcaste" to "*harijan*," Gandhi's popular relabeling of untouchables

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as "God's children." This sort of change still reveals that one is situated within the Hindu social structure. The changing of one's value structure to another solidified religion was a major change, and one that did not seem to Ambedkar to be akin to relabeling the same untouchable attitude with a pretty label.

By reorienting themselves, untouchables can shed that label and gain another one—one that brings the solidarity of the relatively egalitarian religious orientations of Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, or Christians. Instead of encouraging antagonism through efforts to reform Hinduism internally, such an orientational change and renaming of individuals will, according to Ambedkar, decrease the quarrels between low-and high-caste individuals. In their place will be "mutual love and affection" between the former untouchables and the remaining Hindu castes, just as there supposedly was between the Hindu community and the Muslim and Christian communities in India (137). Orientational change is important for Ambedkar because the fundamental *cause* of social inequality is mental. His rhetoric of conversion is reconstructive primarily because it addresses the source of this occlusion of self-worth in his untouchable listeners: "conversion is the only right path of freedom which ultimately leads to equality. The conversion is not the path of escapism. It is not the path of cowardice, it is the path of wisdom" (137). As Ambedkar closes his lengthy but captivating speech, he emphasizes the momentous occasion that this conference on the viability of conversion represents:

> You have to keep in mind that this is, therefore, a crucial occasion . . . today's decision will carve out a path for prosperity of your future generation. If you decide today to get liberated, your future generations will definitely be liberated. If you decide to remain slaves, your future generations will also be slaves. Hence yours is the most difficult task. (146)

This appeal shows the centrality of conversion to Ambedkar's rhetorical advocacy. Why can one not delay the decision? Ambedkar's reasoning would highlight the Deweyan point that our habits—physical and mental—are formed over time, so remaining longer in a state of mental slavery makes it more difficult to escape. As William James advised in his famous chapter on habit in his *Principles of Psychology*, the best way to reform a bad habit is to take the first favorable chance one has to switch to a new habit. Untouchables should seize *this* moment for conversion, although Ambedkar stretches out the act of converting into distinct parts: "[1] Whether to leave the Hindu religion or to remain in it is the first part of the problem. [2] If the Hindu religion is to be abandoned, what other religion should be adopted or whether a new religion should be established, this is the second part of the problem" ("What Way" 146). Our habits are shaken in taking the first step, but we eventually want to resolidify them after reflective reconstruction with the second step. Many religions solicited Ambedkar after this speech in an effort to gain a mass conversion of the untouchables, but he remained uncommitted for almost two decades (Zelliot 156–58). As was the case in his "Annihilation" speech to high-caste reformers, the pressing challenge was evaluating a social situation as problematic

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and as instigating reflective thinking in his audience. For his Mahar audience, the first part might have been a given, but the challenge of instigating reflective thinking in a group that was not socially encouraged to be creative or thoughtful was enormous.

A Pragmatist Rhetoric of Reorientation

Attending to what we can extrapolate from Ambedkar's translation and employment of pragmatism in his battles against social injustice, we can discern a meliorative emphasis on reforming certain wide-ranging mental habits. We can conceptualize this as *rhetorical reorientation*. It is rhetorical insofar as it involves the use of communicative means to move audience members toward an endpoint. It involves reorientation insofar as its goal is not simply conversion, but a multiphase process of choosing a new orientation. This rhetoric of reorientation reacts to what Dewey would call a felt *problematic situation*. The full process uses communicative means to (1) reflectively *evaluate* held and potential orientations, (2) *renounce* a held orientation judged harmful, and (3) *convert* to a more beneficial orientation. In this general account, each of these stages is separate and temporally individuated. One need not do all of them at once, nor appeal to an audience to undergo all immediately. To higher-caste audiences addressed by his "Annihilation" text, Ambedkar mainly attempts to spur reflective thinking concerning the sources of harm in the religious orientations underlying the caste system. To the untouchable audience addressed by his "Emancipation" address, the emphasis was on both reflective analysis of the causes of injustice and renunciation of the orientation enshrined in identifying as a Hindu. By the 1950s, Ambedkar finally settles on Buddhism as the religion to which he and his followers should convert. Much more can be said in future research on how he explicates this favored orientation later in his life, especially in his controversial book, *The Buddha and His Dhamma* (1957; see Queen, "Ambedkar's Dhamma"). But Ambedkar's rhetoric in the 1930s shows that religious orientations can be meliorated even without postulating a complete answer to a problem (that is, undergoing all three steps to reorientation). Regardless of the uncertain direction of his third step, he still advocated reflecting on and renouncing Hinduism to both his higher-caste Hindu audiences and his oppressed untouchable listeners. This was a difficult pill for the former to swallow, but not so much for the latter audience already conversant with the experiences of untouchability. His untouchable followers did require a discursive push to see renunciation as meliorative and as a source of hope.

Ambedkar's rhetorical activity represents a unique translation of the pragmatist focus on community and habit into an Indian context featuring a plurality of religious orientations and a pressing need for social melioration. In other words, Ambedkar's rhetoric of reorientation synthetically foregrounds the role agents can play in empowering themselves and others in seeking social justice. Extending previous accounts that focus on conversion rhetoric as largely self-focused (e.g., Boone;

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Griffin; Spencer), this study has highlighted conversion as a *persuasive*, other-focused attempt to enable communal change. Ambedkar was convinced of his need to convert and was trying to empower others to notice the reasons that moved him to that decision. His translation of pragmatist ideas into a unique set of rhetorical texts was aimed at achieving this effect. Ambedkar's attempts at reorientation did not assume a switch from non-believer to believer; his thought thereby offers a stark contrast to the tenor of puritan conversion rhetoric discussed by Eugene White. The pluralistic setting of the Indian subcontinent has long created a respect for argumentative exchanges among rival *darśanas* (literally, "ways of seeing") or philosophical systems (Sen). The model that Ambedkar works with is that of believers choosing from among a range of equally viable religious alternatives. Even though one has an orientation, one can reorient him or herself through an act of will, initiated either by the agent or by a powerful rhetor like Ambedkar. This model is archetypically pragmatist since it foregrounds choice among options with an eye toward beneficial results; it is distinctively Indian since it assumes such a rich starting ground of religious diversity and potential intergroup argumentation. The three steps of reorientation are based on the idea that religions have effects, and these orientations can be taken up or sloughed off at will. The individual will is vital—it is both that which is conditioned by habits and that which could change or reform these habits. The individual conditions the social in a dialectical pragmatist sense; groups are made up of individuals bearing similar habits, and these habits are influenced by group membership and the experience it channels for individuals. Ambedkar's main theme, at least in his speeches on conversion, is that the maximally promising intervention must focus on meliorating the fundamental orientations that lie at the root of social functioning.

Conversion of individuals is thereby a way to better society. Ambedkar's pragmatism is revolutionary in that it seeks major changes that affect social justice; it is not revolutionary in the way that is typically understood by those extending Karl Marx's general orientation to social change. To see the distinctiveness of Ambedkar's sense of reorientation through rhetorical means, it is helpful to refer to how he engages communist thought in a speech given in English to the World Buddhist Council in Nepal on November 20, 1956. Entitled "Buddha or Karl Marx," this address engages the alternative of communism that Ambedkar saw as tempting his untouchable *and* international Buddhist followers. While he postulates that communism and Buddhism agree on the same *ends*—a world without suffering—they disagree radically on the *means* by which to achieve this state. Communism, on Ambedkar's account, allows the forceful changing of opposing others to achieve the end of freeing the proletariat, up to and including "violence and killing of the opposed" (554). The end that is sought is largely conceived of as a change in material conditions, and force is an acceptable means to create this state of affairs for the communist. But Ambedkar would see in his reading of Buddhism the view that force, whether in harmful actions or hammering words, was not the correct means: "The greatest thing that the Buddha has done is to tell the world that the

world cannot be reformed except by the reformation of the mind of man, and the mind of the world . . . . There is no trouble when the mind is converted[,] the thing is permanent" (555). The appeals to conversion as reorientation analyzed in the present study, while not yet culminating in an appeal to this Buddhist orientation, strike a similar note. His audiences must reorient themselves and try to persuade others to do the same; no one can find a lasting solution to material or social conditions of injustice through force. Force begets stronger opposing forces, whereas change in the mental orientation of self and others represents or creates the conditions for enacting social improvements that will last even after external force is removed. Ambedkar's temporally drawn-out rhetoric of religious reorientation is a project in changing the social through a free and self-directed mental revolution in the commitments one takes as most central to the conception of self and other, and it behooves us to explore the fundamentally rhetorical nature of his actions in the execution of this endeavor.

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